



## U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

### St. Vincent and the Grenadines

#### International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

St. Vincent and a chain of smaller islands, the Grenadines, have an area of 150 square miles, and the population is approximately 117,000. Christianity is the dominant religion. Most persons who claim a religious affiliation associate with the Anglican Church, although they may not be formal members of a congregation. The Anglican denomination has approximately 24,000 members, with one-third described as active. Formal membership remained constant over the period covered by this report, although the Anglican Church has lost many of its informally affiliated followers to evangelical denominations.

The Methodist Church has 4,500 members registered with congregations, although 12,000 persons claimed a Methodist affiliation in the last census. The majority of these 4,500 members are active in their church, which has experienced slow growth in recent years.

Approximately 11,000 citizens are Roman Catholic, and a majority of them are active in the Church. Membership has remained constant over the past few years.

The Seventh-day Adventist denomination claims 11,000 members and describes 50 percent as active. Evangelical in nature, the group continues to grow steadily.

There are 20 to 30 Pentecostal denominations present. The largest denomination, the Pentecostal Assembly of the West Indies, claims approximately 20 congregations. Overall, there are approximately 70 Pentecostal congregations. This group started to expand rapidly approximately 25 years ago and continues to grow. There is a small Salvation Army presence estimated at 70 members.

The number of non-Christians is small. The Baha'i Faith has approximately 1,500 adherents and is growing, and there are a small number of Rastafarians.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship. The Government maintains a close relationship with the Christian Council, an organization comprised of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Salvation Army, and Methodist denominations.

Christian holy days, including Good Friday, Easter, Whit Monday, and Christmas, are national holidays.

Students in public schools receive non-denominational religious instruction based on the Christian faith; however, students are not forced to participate in religious instruction. Representatives from different religious groups occasionally are invited to speak to the students. Most speakers represent the Anglican or Catholic Church. Teachers may provide information on other religions.

The Government occasionally organizes interfaith services through the Christian Council. In 2003, the Government sponsored a day of prayer in conjunction with all Christian denominations.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

Adherents to the Rastafarian faith complained that the use of marijuana, used in their religious rituals, was illegal and that their members were victims of societal discrimination, especially in hiring.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

#### Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. However, some members of society do not hold Rastafarianism in high regard because of its popular association with marijuana use. Rastafarians complained that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools. Some tension continued to exist among different Christian denominations. For example, some evangelical Christians allegedly criticized Catholics and mainline Protestants for adherence to "slave religions" and for not accepting a literal interpretation of the Bible. A Baha'i representative claimed that some followers hide their faith from friends and co workers to avoid criticism and discrimination.

The Christian Council of Churches conducts activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith. Although the Christian Council has opened membership to all Christian denominations, none of the evangelical churches have joined.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy also discusses religious freedom with local groups and other organizations.

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[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51653.htm)